

The People vs. Drew Peterson

Juror #15: Divorced Secretary in Her 50's Who Writes Poetry...

We filed into the jury box, sat in our assigned seats, and waited for the judge to tell us what to do next. Several sheriff's deputies were scattered throughout the courtroom, hands on their hips, fingers pointing toward their guns. I was very nervous, not from any lack of conviction or any second thoughts about my one-twelfth part of the jury's decision; I was overwhelmed by the heaviness hanging silently in this room, the room which had been witness to six weeks of thought focused on a small cast of characters. During that time, my mind was centered on a retired police sergeant, his third deceased wife, his fourth missing wife, their neighbors, relatives, friends; two teams of lawyers, medical and police investigators, analysts and experts; a pastor and a divorce attorney.

Now it was almost over and I presumed most eyes were on us or the defendant. I looked only at the judge, the bailiff and the carpeted floor beneath my feet. There were injured people in the gallery, people whose hearts had been grieving for years. I don't know if any of Drew Peterson's children were there or not, but I was pretty sure the Savio and Cales families were represented. I didn't want to see ~~the~~ any more of the pain in any of their faces.

I ask myself, "Who are these people?" I didn't know any of them before the trial, and I don't really know any of them now either. But I am a mother; I was a wife; I am a sister, a daughter, a grandmother, an aunt, a cousin. I have experienced the sudden death of a loved one. I can't say I know how any one of those people feel. I am not insensitive to the pain of a young man who lost his mother and now feels he is losing the father he loves.

I am reminded of a passage from an essay by John Donne: "No man is an island, entire of itself..."

any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." (Meditation XVII, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions).

Two days of deliberations included reviewing Tom Peterson's testimony along with that of all the other witnesses. There was much to consider.

I never doubted it was a homicide. Accidental death from a slip and fall just stretched the limits of belief for me. Kathleen landed on her side, but had bruises on her shins and across both sides of the collarbone. There was the laceration on the back of her head and abrasions on her backside. No, this was no accident. I thought all her injuries indicated a violent struggle.

Our instructions charged us to consider all of the evidence and come to a decision beyond a reasonable doubt. By the time I had heard all of the testimony up to Neil Schori's, I was fairly certain I was ready to vote guilty. After his testimony, it was a lock; now there was no going back. I wrote in my notebook, "You really really did it!" The realization was chilling.

I voted guilty on the first vote in the jury room. I was sure other jurors had heard things I'd missed and that we certainly would have differences in perceptions as well. Time was taken to hear what everyone had to say and after awhile a new vote was taken. The result was then 11 guilty and 1 "open" which I interpreted as "undecided."

The "open" juror gave the reasons for his indecision. It seemed to me that the main problem he had was with the hearsay evidence. He said he had attended law school for two years some time ago and he needed our help to get him to a decision. He had some questions and he needed to review

his notes. By 5:30 or 6:00 that first day, he had not yet finished reviewing, and we were offered the opportunity to go home for the night. "Open" juror said he would feel better if he could sleep on it.

The next day, he asked his questions, some of which included asking other jurors who had originally voted "not guilty" how or what had turned them around.

There was a lot more talk, and he re-read his notes. After a few hours, I became impatient and started pacing. During this time, the jury foreperson went to the bailiff with a question. I asked where he was going and someone answered, "He has a question." I asked, "What question?" Got no response. The bailiff knocked on the door a little while later, gave the foreperson a folded sheet of paper. Somebody said, "He got an answer," and I asked again, "What was the question?" Somebody told him to just read the judge's note. It was an answer to the foreperson's question about the definition of "unanimous." Could have knocked me over with a feather.

Finally, the "open" juror made a decision and gave his reasons. I don't remember what they all were. I was very tired by this time.

In the courtroom, Judge Burmila asked our young foreperson if we had reached a verdict and he said we had. The guilty verdict was announced. I heard a gasp in the gallery. Then I heard crying. I could not look up. My stomach was in knots.

We were led out of the courtroom and back to the jury room where we had been confined for so long. I asked another juror if the crying had come from Kathleen's family. She said yes. I thought, and may have said, "Then it was good."

I sat down, the bailiff came in and explained what would happen next, said we were "the best bunch of people ever," and informed us the judge would speak to us before we left. There was a lot of talking, some of it loud, but ~~this~~^{this} was nothing unusual for us. We had been loud before in this room, and more than a few times bailiffs had come in to ask us to "keep it down." We were an exuberant group with a lot of energy. At one time or another, all of us had complained about not having the opportunity to participate in our favorite activities, or not being able to get outside in the fresh air. Some of the jurors were golfers, one was a runner, some had regular work-out schedules. I had just bought myself a bicycle a week before the trial—a Panama Jack, white-wall tired, turquoise and white beauty, and had been taking it out for a spin every night after work. The trial sapped all my energy. We all had stories about going home and falling asleep in front of the TV, about being "just totally exhausted."

The judge came in and thanked us for our hard work and patience. He told us about the everywhere-ness of the press. He explained that we could speak to whomever we pleased. Or not. And then we received press packets, folders with copies of many requests from TV stations and newspapers for individual or group interviews. More than once during our confinement, the jury had discussed speaking to the press, and one of the things we said was we would interview "as a group or not at all." I don't think everyone agreed. Some jurors said they didn't want to have anything to do with the press whatsoever. I announced that if anyone was offering me a trip to California and/or enough money, I would be happy to talk my head off. We laughed. Maybe not all of us.

We were told we would be protected from any kind of contact with the press until we got to the location where we had left our cars, but we should be prepared to be followed, to be approached. If anyone felt harassed, we should feel free to call our local police and Judge Burmila "would not treat this lightly."

I saw three helicopters overhead when I got out of the sheriff's van. It seemed unreal. And exciting. The jurors dispersed. A few of us had planned to stop and have a drink and talk things over. I am pretty sure everyone knew about it, but not everyone planned to go. I did plan to go, but couldn't find the place and decided to go home. On the way, I got two text messages. I'm not good at text messaging, and I'd never read or send one in a car without pulling over somewhere, so it was killing me to wait to read them.

Suddenly I felt extremely thirsty. A couple of blocks from my house, I stopped at a soft-serve ice-cream place. I read my text messages before getting out of the car. My daughter: "Call me some time tonight if you can. Good job—I'm proud of you." My son: "Saw you get in your car...from helicopter."

I went to the window of the ice-cream place and asked if they had 7-Up or Sprite. The man said they didn't have either; the closest they had was a lime slushee. I said I'd take a small one. He set it down in the window and said, "Well, they got that Peterson guy, huh?" I had to tell him. "Yes," I said, "I was on the jury. I'm just on my way home and felt so thirsty I didn't think I'd make it." He waved away my money and said, "My treat." I said, "Really?"

When I got home, I called work to say that I was just flat-out exhausted, and if it wasn't a problem, I wanted to take a personal day tomorrow (Friday).

I checked my email. Message from my daughter-in-law: "Congratulations! You guys did good work and a ton of it. And made a lot of people happy. We saw you get escorted to your cars on Channel 7. Hunter (my grandson) was excited...you are a star."

Message from a fellow juror: "...the press is parked in front of my house. It is only 4:20 and they are here!"

I called my son, asked for Hunter. He said, "Gramma Judy, you were on TV all over the world. I saw you in your pink shirt." My number-one fan.

I was on the phone for the next couple of hours, finally able to talk about the case with my son and then my daughter. I had stuff to share with them and they had been saving stuff to share with me. (One night I called my daughter and she said, "Oh Ma, don't call me. We can't say anything.")

A reporter from the Chicago Tribune came to my door twice. I took her card and told her if I felt like talking, I'd call her. I didn't call and she came back the next morning.

That evening, I got 55 emails and 34 text messages. I didn't count the phone calls (incoming and outgoing). Jurors and I swapped stories about the press camping out at the end of their driveways, and in the streets in front of their houses. Somebody said we were offered a trip to New York for an interview on Saturday. I told everyone about the lime ~~slurpee~~ ^{slushee} at the ice-cream place and added that I was thinking of getting a T-shirt made that said on the front:

Drew Peterson Juror

I Will Take Anything Free You Wanna Give Me

It went on and on until somebody (Eduardo Saldana, I think) emailed about a press conference at the Will County Administration Building on Friday at 1 p.m. More texts, phone calls, emails. Then more.

In between, I was DVR-ing the local news reports and the interviews with Ron Supala, and trying to catch up on news we didn't get in the courtroom.

It was frantic. I stayed up quite late and it was very hard to calm down, even though I felt so tired I thought I'd fall over. Finally though, there were no more emails, no more texts, no more phone calls. I got into bed. After tossing, turning, fretting, reviewing, rehashing, sleep came over me, obliterating the day.

I woke early the next morning, answered three or four emails, made and received two or three phone calls, and went out for breakfast. Waitresses came over to say how glad they were that Peterson had been convicted.

I decided not to go to the press conference.

Some jurors were not happy about the arrangements for the press conference. It was felt that we had agreed on an "all or none" interview, but perhaps not all had agreed. Some people who were unable to attend because they had gone back to work, would have liked to go, but didn't have enough notice to do so. Some felt that the jurors who attended did not know what other jurors were thinking and did not represent them.

Today is Saturday and it is so very quiet, I have to keep reminding myself that this quiet is my "normal". I have been high on the excitement of the trial, and I am making the adjustments necessary to return to life "after Peterson." I went to my grandson's soccer game this morning, and for a while, Drew Peterson didn't exist. Now I am doing my laundry and on Monday will return to work.

I met some nice people in the jury room. They were, at times, a lot of fun. They were also conscientious, thoughtful people who were all trying to do the right thing.

The trial was a learning experience for me and I'm glad I was able to help get justice for Kathleen Savio and her family and friends. I hope one day justice comes for Stacy Peterson too.

I can't wait to go back to work.